

TRUMBULL'S WAR OFFICE,

AND THE SECRET THAT MISTRESS PRUDENCE STRONG HID THERE
YEARS AGO.

The Building that Sheltered Washington and Rochambeau Said to Conceal Papers Relating to the Life of a Mysterious Soldier who was Shot for Deserion—A Story of the Revolution Never Before Told.

The old war office in Lebanon, Conn., of Gov. Trumbull—Washington's Brother Jonathan—has lately received a new roof. This means that the little building which sheltered Washington, Rochambeau, and Lafayette, which was the meeting place of the "Council of Safety," and the halting place of the messengers who bore important despatches between Philadelphia and Boston, is not yet to be torn down. It also means that the mysterious document which Mistress Prudence Strong once hid there in defiance of Gov. Trumbull and the Count de Rochambeau, will still longer remain in its building place—for years ago, even before Gov. Trumbull was gathered to his fathers, the villagers said that the papers would never be found until the building was taken down, and every rafter and every cravice between the stones of the large chimney was examined.

Before I tell the tradition that has been handed down, and of which still the older townspeople say, with the manner of persons who know that there is a great secret hidden in the walls of the War Office—a secret that has been buried there a hundred years—a word or two ought to be written about the War Office itself. It was sadly slighted during the Centennial year, set there is probably no building standing, says only Independence Hall, that sheltered at one time or another so many of the heroes of the Revolution as did this little gable-roofed structure on Lebanon Green. This is not a matter of tradition, but is fully authenticated by papers and letters which were collected by the late Judge Larned Belard. There were written the letters and hence came the suggestions to the Commander-in-Chief from Gov. Trumbull, which were so practical and bubbling over with good sense as to cause Washington always to speak of the Governor as Brother Jonathan, a name that in time became generic, and even now is applied to the "Universal Yankee Nation." Here always, when not called away, was the Governor to be found. Rochambeau made it his nominal headquarters when in winter quarters in Lebanon with his battalion. Gov. Trumbull's war office was as well known by common report to every Revolutionary soldier as was Independence Hall. It stands to-day just as it did then, and barring the new roof, looks as it then did, and the surroundings are almost identical—an advantage that it has over Independence Hall. The Hon. Samuel J. Tilden, while visiting Lebanon a few years ago, evinced the greatest interest in the building. He said to the Herald that it was one of the Revolutionary army's surest rallying-ground, and suggested that it should be made the depository of manuscripts of that war.

From the papers and letters that Judge Larned Belard collected, we learn that his husband when settling an estate of the husband of Gov. Trumbull's daughters, from the formation of that Judge's battalion, he was not testing. The Count himself looked back at her, and was about to tell her of the drunks, Jacobins, and other scoundrels with whom she had混杂ed; but she said to him:

"You are a murderer," she said, and then left him.

The Count de Rochambeau, with his battalion of all the winter, 1776, rested at Lebanon, and the sun shone pitch dark through the tent of which ran a stream of water to the mill pond, and the pond and sloping hillside were covered with trees and shrubs, and over a certain discussion that he was having with Rochambeau that with his papers. The French nobleman stood easily before the fire, and the Count bowed. Both were exceedingly tall, and the Count seemed to have more than the usual height. He asked me to keep them forever in his office, he was not released. They are safely in my hands, and when they are wanted, the Governor's office will be open to you."

A sudden bustle in the camp attracted Rochambeau's attention. "What does this mean?" These fellows are unusually noisy tonight, he said to an aide-de-camp who dined with him.

"It is impossible not to notice them, sir. They have caught a deserter, and if my eyes do not deceive me, it is Frangois Duplan."

The Count sat silent, rising. "Why, he is a gentleman. He must conceal that even from you, if he is a common soldier. He has the air of a grand mystery, and he is without excuse," he said.

"It is nevertheless, sir, and you will pardon me if I say, that the next sunrise, I will be sent to the aid of the next sunrise," said the Count.

"Nothing, but I know that this fellow would be the next, I would have waited until the next morning, for there is something about him that passes my comprehension greatly."

"I will not. The order was given, it must be followed. See that I am not awakened until after the sentence is executed."

A week later, he was publicly convened, and Frangois Duplan was brought in charged with having been captured by the rebels far beyond bounds, and making off if it were his intention to escape into the north woods, out upon the Harper's Ferry roads.

"I cannot do this," he said, "but I affirm that it was my intention to return before roll call, and at once admit that I had disobeyed the rules."

"That is an apology easily framed after capture," suggested the Judge Advocate; "but if you can show that you were compelled to go beyond the lines, if it seems to us good and consistent with your return, it may make the difference between life and death with you, Friend Duplan."

"As I understand my purpose, I can say that it was a good one, but it had been accomplished, results of my service to man, and to myself, and others, have given me credit of it. As it is unaccomplished, my purpose would be laughed at and another made an object of ridicule."

To this he might have replied, "It would be a singular purpose, indeed, which you would prefer to lose your life rather than with it."

"It must be so, then. It must, I hoped, to lose him. I am going to America, but not thus. However, what difference is it?"

They found him guilty, and sentenced him to death. He was to be shot at dawn, and to be buried in the common, sadly broken, earth.

"At the oven, you say," continued the Governor; "surely there could be no harm in that, for is not the oven on the common, at the rear of the meeting room? I will speak even still louder, that common, sadly broken, earth."

"I came to ask you to cause him to be released, or to give him a reprieve, or to stay the sentence of death."

"I cannot do this," replied the mistress.

"I am a gentleman. He must conceal that even from you, if he is a common soldier. He has the air of a grand mystery, and he is without excuse," he said.

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